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Viewing cable 06TELAVIV3399, INITIAL IMPACT OF ISRAEL-HIZBALLAH WAR ON ISRAEL

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06TELAVIV3399	2006-08-25 11:32	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Tel Aviv

Appears in these articles:

[not](#)
[yet](#)
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null
Leza L Olson 08/28/2006 01:41:33 PM From DB/Inbox: Leza L Olson

Cable
Text:

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 03399

SIPDIS
CXTelA:
ACTION: POL
INFO: IPSC PD ADM AID IMO CONS RES ECON DCM DAO AMB
RSO

DISSEMINATION: POL
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: POL/C:NOLSEN
DRAFTED: POL:MCKEAYS
CLEARED: POL:NOLSEN, DAO:TWILLIAMSON

VZCZCTVI129
PP RUEHC RUEHXK RHEHNSC RUEKJCS RUEAIIA

DE RUEHTV #3399/01 2371132
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 251132Z AUG 06
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5909
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TEL AVIV 003399

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA (MAHER), PM
PENTAGON FOR OSD ISRAEL DESK OFFICER (ANDERSON)
NSC FOR LOGERFO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/22/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PINR](#) [LE](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: INITIAL IMPACT OF ISRAEL-HIZBALLAH WAR ON ISRAEL
DEFENSE FORCES, MINISTRY OF DEFENSE

Classified By: Political Counselor Norm Olsen. Reasons: 1.4 (b, d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In the wake of the 34-day Israel-Hizballah War, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) are reviewing their performance across the board, and taking stock of achievements and mistakes with an eye towards assigning blame, where necessary, and gathering lessons learned for application in future such conflicts. Israeli media reports have been largely negative, reporting on alleged logistical failures, equipment problems, and an absence of sound leadership throughout the conflict. IDF Chief of Staff LTG Dan Halutz has been criticized, for instance, for selling his stocks in the early hours of the conflict, and then taking a few hours off to take care of family matters. The replacement of the IDF's battlefield commander midway through the conflict was also the subject of intense media speculation. Israel's political leadership -- reeling from the media attack and the apparent public concern for how the war was conducted and ended -- has called for the formation of a professional commission of inquiry. At this stage, it is still too early to speculate on what effect the commission will have, if any. Nevertheless, the IDF will not be able to proceed with business as usual -- especially as most Israelis expect that a second round with Hizballah is just around the corner. END SUMMARY.

MOD, IDF TAKING STOCK OF ACHIEVEMENTS AND FAILURES

¶2. (C) Near the close of the Israel-Hizballah War, long-time embassy contacts within the MOD conveyed to emboffs upbeat assessments of the results of the war. The MOD's POC for Strategic Dialogues, Rami Yungman, told poloff August 8 that he did not expect to see any shake-up within Israel's military intelligence community in the aftermath of the war. While Yungman could not clearly define an Israeli victory over Hizballah, he strained to point out that Israel had succeeded in degrading Hizballah's long-range rocket capability, and shown Hizballah that if it attacks Israel, it will pay a heavy price. MOD Political-Military Bureau Head MGEN (Res.) Amos Gilad told CODEL Miller and emboffs August 9 that "the results of the bloody war with Hizballah were better than they could have been. Hizballah's long-range rockets have been destroyed," he claimed. "Bunkers near the border have been destroyed. It is a real intelligence victory." Gilad added, "We have counted the Hizballah dead, name-by-name, as we have a list with at least 250 names on it. We cannot release it due to sensitivity. Meanwhile, Hizballah is hiding the corpses and not releasing the names."

13. (C) More time to reflect after the war's cessation on August 14 has led to more sober assessments of the IDF's performance and Israel's achievements. General Halutz reportedly claimed in an August 21 Cabinet meeting that Israel had won "not by a knock-out, but on points," and admitted to reservists with whom he met that failures had been made, and that his sale of stocks on the day the war began was an error in judgment. Israeli Defense Intelligence (IDI) officers told a visiting Senate Foreign Relations Committee staffer August 24 that Israel succeeded in placing Hizballah in a "more inferior position than before," even if Hizballah has not been significantly degraded in a military sense. The widespread destruction of Hizballah's offices in southern Beirut are seen by the IDI as a significant blow to the "state within a state" concept that Hizballah had successfully projected. The IDI believes that Hizballah is concerned about the strengthening of Lebanon's statehood, the expansion of its sovereignty with the Lebanese Armed Forces' (LAF) deployment in the south, and the increasing involvement of the international community in Lebanon. The IDI officers admitted that Hizballah had not been "knocked out," but claimed that many of its medium-to-long range rockets launchers had been destroyed, most of its bunkers and positions in the south had been demolished, and some 500 of its fighters had been killed. On the other hand, the IDI officers noted that Hizballah retains a residual long-range missile capability, still possesses an estimated 6,000-8,000 short-range rockets, maintained its command and control capability during and after the war, and is already rebuilding a number of its offices that the Israeli Air Force destroyed in bombing attacks on southern Beirut. The IDI officers uniformly agreed that it is highly unlikely that the GOL or LAF will try to disarm or dismantle Hizballah.

14. (C) The new MOD director general, MGEN (Ret.) Gabi Ashkenazi told the Ambassador August 24 that the IDF is still examining how it managed the war, and that it is too early to draw any specific conclusions. Ashkenazi said, however, that it is clear that there were failures and that steps must be taken to ensure that they do not happen again. According to the DG, IDF Chief of Staff LTG Dan Halutz has already drawn up a plan that will address problems with reservists, command and control, and Israel's level of readiness: "We know what to do. We need to provide more training to the reservists. We need to admit that our regular forces were more involved in executing operations in the West Bank and Gaza than they probably should have been." "The biggest lesson learned," Ashkenazi added, "is that the results could have and should have been better. The military experts will specify the successes and failures in numerous areas. A number of reasons have to do with how we began the war, what the targets were, and how to hit them." Ashkenazi stressed that he believes that Hizballah has been hurt and that the GOL is taking on more responsibility: "Still, we should prepare for a second round with Hizballah, and possibly Syria, because Syria must pay for its role in this war."

MEDIA FOCUSES ON SUPPLY, EQUIPMENT AND LEADERSHIP FAILURES

15. (C) While the IDF is looking inward and compiling lessons learned, the Israeli media is giving voice to frustrated IDF soldiers and bereaved families that feel Israel's military performed poorly during the war. One of the themes in the criticism concerns technology, with the assertion being that nothing should be too expensive when it comes to saving lives. In mid-July, the Jerusalem Post ran an article alleging that several senior Armored Corps officers expressed their frustration over what they claimed was the defense establishment's refusal to pay for the installation of the Trophy active defense system on Israel's Merkava tanks. The officers claimed that that Trophy system -- developed by Israeli defense industry giant Rafael -- is capable of neutralizing all anti-tank rockets in Hizballah's arsenal, and said that soldiers were being killed and wounded unnecessarily, paying the price for budget constraints. Ashkenazi told the Ambassador in their August 24 meeting that

the MOD "stunned" PM Olmert when it presented its budget request on August 23: "The figures are huge, but we need a budget. It is the second priority for me after resolving the export control issue and putting it behind us."

¶6. (SBU) The Israeli paper, Yedioth Ahronoth, recently reported of an August 20 meeting between IDF Chief of Staff Halutz and commanders of the Alexandroni Brigade -- a unit that fought in the western sector of southern Lebanon -- during which the commanders related how their junior officers no longer have confidence in the IDF's senior officers. The commanders told Halutz about problems they faced with the supply of food and water to combat areas, missing equipment, and outdated tactical intelligence. One officer reportedly complained that he received photos of a village his unit was to enter that were taken in 2002. Two reservists from the Alexandroni Brigade noted their intent to start a protest march from the historic battle site of Castel, outside Jerusalem, to the Prime Minister's residence in Jerusalem. They said that once at the residence, they would stage a sit-in until Prime Minister Olmert resigns. One of the soldiers told the newspaper, "We are at a turning point. We have finished a campaign, and now Iran and Syria are waiting. We have a strong army, but the leadership does not know what to do."

¶7. (SBU) More recently, the Israeli Internet news outlet YNET reported on a petition submitted by reservists of the Galilee Division's 300th Brigade to their commander in which they claimed that their company commander refused to debrief the soldiers in order to gather lessons learned regarding battlefield operations, their equipment, and the manner of their release from duty. In the petition, the soldiers state they do not intend to serve further in the IDF, and request that they not be called up for future active reserve duty. One of the petition-signers interviewed by YNET stated that his unit destroyed launchers and terrorist infrastructure in the western zone of southern Lebanon, but received poor treatment and faulty equipment, and suffered from supply problems. Another of the signers complained that the amount of recovery time after their operations deep in Lebanon was insufficient. When asked, unidentified IDF sources stated that they are looking into the complaints lodged in the petition. Israeli commentators observe that this particular issue is resolvable, but -- if not handled correctly -- could lead to a situation in which members of the 300th Brigade move their protest to Jerusalem.

¶8. (SBU) In another recent petition, IDF reservists assigned to the Spearhead Brigade in Lebanon vigorously protested to Israeli DefMin Peretz and General LTG Halutz what they termed indecisiveness and "cold feet" among Israel's leadership. They claim that the indecisiveness manifested itself in inaction, the failure to carry out operational plans, last-minute cancellation of missions, and prolonged stays in hostile territory. The signers suggest that the war aims were not clearly defined and were changed during the course of the fighting, and that the leadership ultimately sought to avoid engagement with the enemy. In light of this, the signers wonder why they were called up, and charge Israel's leadership with immorality and shamelessness, as well as irresponsibility in not preparing over the previous six years for the fight with Hizballah. The signers assert that they will fulfill future call-ups, but also contend that the crisis of confidence affecting the IDF will not be resolved until there is a thorough investigation conducted that leads to conclusions concerning strategic planning, national security, and personal leadership.

¶9. (SBU) Conveying a sense of pleasant surprise, the newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth reported extensively August 21 on remarks made by Chief Infantry and Paratroopers Officer BGEN Yossi Hyman at his own retirement ceremony. According to the paper, Hyman acknowledged publicly his and many other officers' personal responsibility for the failure to prepare Israel's troops for war. He attributed the collective failure and missed opportunities to "the sin of arrogance," a focus on achievements, deliberate efforts to cover up

military ignorance, and a lack of understanding about the profession of arms. Hyman stressed to all present that it is time for the IDF to "demonstrate quiet, honest, responsible and mature leadership," and investigate all the problems and failures that occurred. He suggested that this is necessary to prepare for the next war -- a war with an enemy that is constantly improving itself and strengthening.

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY TO INVESTIGATE ALLEGATIONS

¶10. (SBU) In a move that appears designed to head off mounting criticism -- but which is also in keeping with precedents set by the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the 1982 Invasion of Lebanon -- DefMin Peretz announced August 16 that he would establish a committee of inquiry to examine the events of the Israel-Hizballah War. Even though Peretz appointed a former IDF chief of staff, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, to head the committee, Israeli media reports suggest that the announcement of the commission was met with harsh criticism from members of the IDF, defense establishment and the Knesset. Unidentified military sources reportedly expressed skepticism that the committee could be critical of DefMin Peretz, as Lipkin-Shahak served on Peretz's team of external advisers during the war. Meretz-Yahad MK Yossi Beilin cautioned that he would not accept Peretz's committee as a substitute for an independent state commission of inquiry. Likud MK Gideon Sa'ar stressed in his public comments that any such committee should investigate Israel's political leadership as well as the IDF. National Union-NRP MK Uri Ariel compared Peretz's committee to a "spit in the face" of Israel's soldiers, contending that the general public and Israeli soldiers demand an independent commission that can examine the Defense Minister. On August 21, Peretz's committee suspended its activities after one day of work, providing no reason to the public for the suspension. Media analysts suggest two possible reasons: that an independent state commission is being formed, and that the Justice Ministry is reviewing a demand by the IDF that testifying officers be provided immunity.

¶11. (SBU) Two other investigative bodies are on track to examine the events prior to, during, and after the war. The State Comptroller's Office is collecting data and documents for an investigation, details of which remain scarce. The Knesset's powerful Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee has already conducted an investigation and is soon to provide an interim report of its findings. Preliminary findings revealed to the press indicate that the report's authors will contend that there were serious flaws in the home front's preparedness for a war, and that Home Front Command had been in a state of only "partial operation" and did not call up its reserves. The committee's report will also claim that the GOI never discussed evacuating people from the north, and that there was no entity to coordinate the activity of NGOs operating in the north during the war. Such claims will likely encourage complaints from residents of northern Israel, many of whom contend that the GOI abandoned them early on in the war.

¶12. (SBU) A majority of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee's members support the establishment of a state commission of inquiry. Only Kadima members, including committee Chairman Tzachi Hanegbi, have opposed the formation of a state commission. Arguing that there is no choice but to establish a state commission, Labor MK and former IDF Major General Matan Vilnai -- who lost out to Peretz for leadership of Labor and who sees himself as a future Prime Minister -- told the press, "We are in a crisis similar to that after the Yom Kippur War from the point of view of the behavior of the army and intelligence."

ISRAELIS PROCESSING WAR'S RESULTS WHILE STILL IN SHOCK

¶13. (SBU) Amid all the accusations of incompetence from

quarters critical of the IDF and DefMin Peretz, voices are also being heard from soldiers families. Protests mounted by IDF reservists in Jerusalem August 21 were joined by family members of some of the more than 110 IDF soldiers killed in the Israel-Hizballah War. One mother of an IDF sergeant killed in Lebanon told Ha'aretz journalists, "The leadership failed and it must go. For that, we do not need inquiries." Other family members have called for the resignations of PM Olmert, DefMin Peretz, and General Halutz. A group of mourning families have announced their intention to hold a protest march on August 25, and present a letter to PM Olmert demanding his resignation. Israelis appear to be processing the results of the war while still in a state of shock from the war itself. As one Israeli citizen commented to poloff, this is the first time Israel watched a war it was involved in real-time. Israelis learned within hours about casualties, deaths and battlefield developments, whereas in previous wars (e.g., the Six Day War, the Yom Kippur War), they received packaged results days after those wars had ended

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JONES